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Nation

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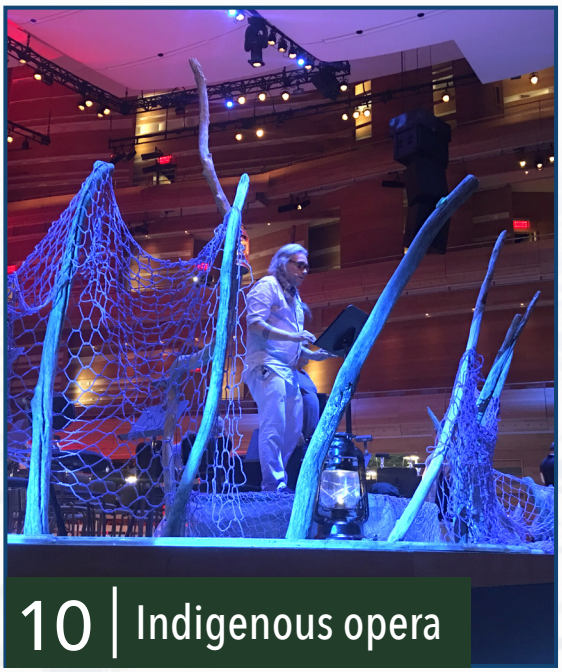

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Peter Pelchat
Taken from
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Editorial

Choices

by Will Nicholls

When I was young, whenever an election was held for chief of the community, candidates would stand facing the crowd. Then the people would line up in front of the person they thought should be the chief. Someone would count the people in front of each person willing to assume the office.

The willingness to do so was with the realization that they would become a servant of the people rather than serving their own desires. While this was an interesting democratic system it was still in its infancy. For one thing, the autocratic Indian Agent was still someone who expected to be kowtowed to by the Native.

The system of openly standing up for your choice was replaced by the secret ballot. In the old days your choice wasn't held against you. The change wasn't necessarily a bad thing as your choice might be held against you in today's Cree world.

The choices that were made by Cree leaders and people have lead to self-governance and a truer version of democracy. But what is democracy?

Quite simply democracy is a system whereby each citizen has the right to elect representatives at each level of government (Cree community, Cree Nation Government, Cree entities, provincial and federal governments). These representatives can make decisions and laws that affect all parts of life.

Therein is the strength and weakness of democracy. As a result, there were various checks and balances created to ensure democracy flourishes. For example, in Canada constitutional protection of freedom of expression is not intended for the majority but rather to be a limit on them.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms adds to democracy in its section on Fundamental Freedoms. It says that everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: (a) freedom of conscience and religion; (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication; (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and (d) freedom of association.

Decisions and laws being considered by any elected representative must take those and other such checks and balances into consideration before taking any action. This ensures that it is not majority rule but that the unpopular, social outcast and politically

excluded – those who don't have the numbers – are not denied the benefits of democracy. Denying equal rights to anyone does have consequences.

The path of democracy is one that holds great promise but can lead to a harsher form of political rule if we are not careful. As a Greek statesman Pericles once said, "Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you."

So be sure to vote. We have a vested interest in our democratic representatives, at whatever level.

And a reminder to be sure to vote as Cree people hold the power to elect the candidate of their choice.

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News

Dancing with division

Referendum called in Waskaganish to decide on cultural event

by Dan Isaac

A referendum has been called in Waskaganish to decide the fate of the community's first powwow, despite winning approval from the local band council. Fierce opposition by Chief Darlene Cheechoo and some community organizations has turned what is normally a popular cultural event into a raging controversy.

"In the spring we started raising money for the powwow," Susan Esau, head of Waskaganish's powwow planning committee, told *the Nation*. "In March, when the radio station announced that we were fundraising, our chief went to them and told them to stop."

Esau's group began planning the event in the fall of 2017. In January they sent a letter to the local tallyman. The group received the go-ahead with the stipulation that no ceremony be performed at the powwow. They agreed – but from then on, it's been an uphill battle.

"When we started planning, we said this is a social event, it's not a political matter," Esau said. "We didn't need to ask the chief and council's permission, we needed to ask the local tallyman."

Months later Esau was asked to present to the tri-council committee, an advisory board made up of Chief Cheechoo, and the community's Elders' and Youth councils.

"I stated my piece and thought to myself this was a good educational session," said Esau.

But following Esau's June 4 presentation, the committee voted against having the event in the community.

"I was quite shocked and saddened by the meeting," Esau revealed. "I went to residential school. All my life I've been oppressed by others, and I come home and sit around a table with my own people and I'm still oppressed."

However, the Waskaganish Band Council approved the event at a July 11 council meeting.

According to Waskaganish band councillor Gordon Blueboy, only Chief Cheechoo and another councillor voted against the powwow, while four voted in favour of going ahead with the event. Three councillors abstained from voting.

"Right after the vote, the Chief abruptly said, 'We're going to have referendum on this,'" Blueboy told *the Nation*.

According to Grand Council Executive Director Bill Namagoose, a referendum shouldn't be called over a non-governance issue.

"The question is, who is going to enforce this referendum?" asked Namagoose. "Is the Eeyou Eenou Police Force going to be called in to arrest people for dancing?"

No date has been called for the referendum, but Blueboy believes that discussion will take place at a council meeting scheduled for September 6. He's also determined to broach the subject of the July 11 vote that he feels remains unresolved.

"Why did she call this vote if the result weren't going to be accepted? Regardless of what the chief and council believes, people have a right to their religious freedoms," Blueboy emphasized. "We live in a democracy, not a dictatorship."

Chief Cheechoo did not respond to an interview request from *the Nation*.

On August 30, a public notice was posted to the Waskaganish Eeyou Nation Facebook page informing the community of the decision to hold a referendum on the powwow. Since then, there's been an outcry of online support from Indian country – but within the community, things aren't so simple.

"It really has blown up and it's causing divisions within the community," said Blueboy. "Not just between the two opposing sides but within the church as well."

*"I mean, what are they going to do? **Arrest us?**"*
- Susan Esau

Waskaganish's director of culture, sport and leisure, Charles Hester, woke up to an overflowing inbox in the days following the public announcement.

"I've received at least 15 direct messages on Facebook," Hester told *the Nation*. "I also received a phone call informing me that it's all over powwow country and that a lot of people are planning to attend in support. It might turn out to be a lot bigger than they planned for."

Hester, who isn't part of the powwow committee, believes the event should go ahead. He's also done his best to help out the committee where possible.

"I was brought up in a Christian home and I was told to respect everybody," explained Hester. "We're all different but we pray to the same god in different manners."

As for Esau, she says the uproar of support has been uplifting during what's become a difficult time.

"This powwow was intended to bring people together and celebrate the diversity of our community, not create divisions," lamented Esau. "What's happened – it's ugly. This isn't what I wanted."

The law, however, is on the side of the powwow planners.

The Cree constitution states in section 1.4 that, "The Cree Nation subscribes to the fundamental values of freedom, […] and honour […] for Cree traditions." Meanwhile, freedom of association is protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Regardless of what happens with the referendum, Esau and the committee remain steadfast. "We're having this powwow," she concluded. "I mean, what are they going to do? Arrest us?"

October 1, 2018
provincial election

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Northern Exposure

by William East

Provincial candidates offer their vision for Ungava after the October 1 election

The Nation interviewed provincial election candidates in the Ungava riding to discuss their platforms regarding for the varied Indigenous population of the region. As is to be expected of a riding with the lowest voter turnout rate in Quebec, some of the candidates were very eager to explain what they would do for the Indigenous communities. However, candidates for the Parti Québécois and Conservatives could not be reached for comment; perhaps an indication that they aren't banking on Cree votes to win them the seat this time.

Cristina Roos

Parti vert du Québec

The Parti vert du Québec (PVQ) focuses on environmental issues. It advocates for a relationship of empathy with nature and seeks to reduce its wanton exploitation for profit. How does this translate into practical policies? One proposal aims to forbid logging operations above the 49th parallel, and another wants the government to adopt a new definition of profitability that factors in the environmental and societal cost of resource-extraction projects, like mines and dams.

In recent years, the Greens have transformed themselves to incorporate social justice issues too: they are one of the few parties (alongside Québec solidaire) that explicitly respects First Nation sovereignty and aims to have Indigenous councils represented directly in the National Assembly.

Cristina Roos' decision to run for the PVQ stems from the challenges she saw Northerners faced during her 10-year career in the education sector, and her campaign is focused around making local schooling systems flexible to provide the youth with the tools to determine and preserve their own cultures. "It's important that people recognize colonization is still evident in subtle ways in the north," said Roos.

Vocational schools should also teach the practical skills needed to thrive on the land, to empower Northerners where they feel at home. Rethinking education could increase voter turnout in the future, she argued.

"Lasting change comes from the individual communities themselves, not from outside mandates."

Jean Boucher

CAQ
COALITION AVENIR QUÉBEC

Except for the 19-month minority PQ government of Pauline Marois, the Liberals have been in power in Quebec for more than 15 years. Still, Jean Boucher's win of the northern riding last election marked the first time the Liberals had won the Ungava district since it was created in 1981.

Boucher is running for re-election to do "everything possible to continue the work we have started," he said.

He was quick to acknowledge that he was speaking from Cree territory, and says the Crees should have final say on all projects in their area. When asked how that translates into tangible results, he elaborated upon the moratorium on uranium mining, as an example, where he felt the consultations with the Grand Council were given final say.

Building on his experience of moving to Kuujjuaq in 2007 to develop social housing programs for First Nations, he feels he knows best how to represent Northerners in Quebec City.

For instance, he wants to run feasibility studies in cooperation with local councils to potentially extend Route 167 to reach the Trans Taiga Road and the northern trapping lines.

"After meeting with representatives of the Cree and James Bay communities, I want one of my top priorities to focus on infrastructure. I am concerned that people here have to travel 100 kilometres on gravel roads, which is unacceptable."

This would increase productivity in the region, but he said it must be on the terms of the Crees. He sees himself as the "oil on the chain that connects Quebec City and the Grand Council, within the context of Nation-to-Nation agreement."

He also wants to create a wildlife reserve network, which would be maintained by Indigenous communities.

Denis Lamothe

The CAQ is a nationalist party with three main goals: to reduce immigration to Quebec by 20%, redesign school boards to promote the French language, and to balance the budget by cutting what they consider unnecessary spending and bureaucracy.

They also want to accelerate natural resource extraction in Quebec.

Candidate Denis Lamothe said the party would implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which still hasn't happened under the PLQ.

Lamothe believes the Liberals aren't addressing the most important issues for Northerners, such as Bill 64, the Firearms Regulation Act, which Boucher supported. Lamothe believes it disregards the needs of hunters in the North to score political points with the party and city dwellers.

He is adamant that Quebec needs to rethink its economy and shift away from its $12 billion dependency on federal equalization payments. When asked how that would be achieved, he pointed to Quebec's untapped natural resources in the North.

"Ungava is number one for natural resources, yet it takes two to five years to get a mining contract," he said. "Markets shift drastically in that time, so it can quickly become unprofitable."

Thus, he pledges to disentangle the complicated skill card system that has many residents travelling outside their communities to obtain accreditations.

While the inherent conflict of interest between increasing resource extraction by removing rulings often designed to protect Cree land is evident. But Lamothe promises that locals would be consulted on proposed projects.

Conservative Party of Québec

Québec solidaire

PARTI QUÉBÉCOIS

For many, the separatist PQ and QS have fallen out of favour since the referendum question is off the table for now. The PQ has little concrete policies to offer for Indigenous populations, who overwhelmingly prefer staying in Canada than joining a sovereign Quebec. The fact that PQ candidate Jonathan Mattson couldn't be reached for comment underlined this.

Meanwhile the leftist QS party is focusing its campaign around social justice issues and the redistribution of wealth. While they make an effort to explicitly address First Nations, they make a chaotic impression: only weeks before the election they have no candidate for Ungava.

Also failing to return messages was PCQ candidate Alexandre Croteau.

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In Brief

That dam **rumor**

Residents of Chisasibi were sent running for the hills, literally, after a rumour spread on social media September 1 that a nearby dam had cracked and could collapse at any moment.

The panic caused by the false information had many thinking there was a community-wide evacuation in effect. According to Chief Davey Bobbish, it took about 45 minutes to confirm with Hydro-Québec there was in fact no cause for alarm.

Although the news turned out to be fake, it spread quickly because it played on long-held fears. It also served as a reminder that there's little emergency preparedness in the community to deal with that kind of incident.

One resident voiced his concerns on the Chisasibi Facebook bulletin board.

"It would be useful to know how we would be informed of a potential problem with the dams," wrote Nicholas Ortepi. "What are the sounds/sirens to listen for? It would also be useful to have quick and informative transfer of information for those of us who might not have our radios on."

Kitchen excluded from Waswanipi election

A special assembly was held in Waswanipi to decide whether the nomination of a former chief, John Kitchen, would be accepted. The electoral office alleged that there were several issues with Kitchen's nomination while Kitchen believed he should be allowed to run.

Following the decision to reject his nomination, Kitchen launched a petition to be reinstated on the ballet. It garnered 177 signatures and triggered a special assembly August 27. According to a Facebook post, 103 people voted to maintain the decision by the electoral office and 74 voted to remove the electoral officer and begin the election anew.

While Kitchen told the Nation that he accepts the decision of the community, he also noted he was undecided about pursuing legal action.

Cree leaders meet with **Sami youth**

In early September, Deputy Grand Chief Mandy Gull was invited by Greenpeace to speak to the Sami people in Finland. The Finnish government had proposed an Arctic railway that would transport oil and other natural resources through Sami territory, threatening their reindeer populations.

Bill Namagoose told the Nation the Crees have always been willing to share their knowledge with other Indigenous peoples on how to deal with resource exploitation encroaching upon traditional and cultural lifestyles.

Deputy Chief Gull invited Youth Grand Chief Caitlyn Hester-Moses to accompany her as this affects not only the present generations but also future generations. Gull was inspired on the trip by both Hester-Moses' presentation and the impassioned testimony of a young Sami reindeer herder who said, "Where do I go and who will I be without the reindeer."

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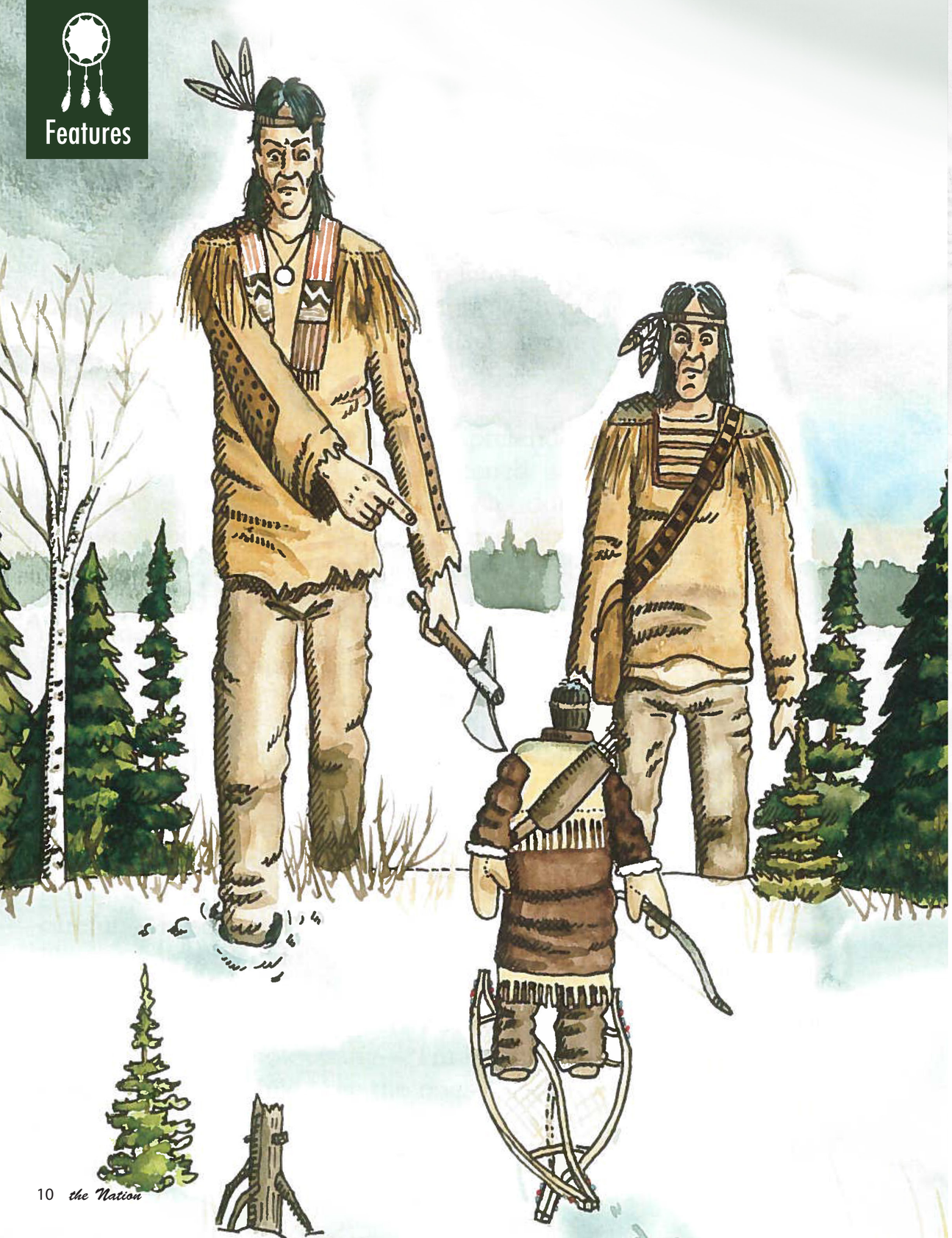

*How we were able to **survive and keep our spirit alive** is being able to laugh through the different challenges we faced as people*

- Ernest Webb

The Trickster's Opera

New Cree chamber opera ***Chaakapesh: The Trickster's Quest*** comes to the North

by Patrick Quinn | Illustrations by Peter Pelchat

The tundra will be alive with the sound of music this month as the world-renowned Orchestre symphonique de Montréal (OSM) brings a Cree-language chamber opera to the north.

From September 9-19, maestro Kent Nagano and the OSM's musicians will trace a path from Nunavik through Quebec's interior toward the Lower North Shore, taking them to six villages in three nations: Inuit, Innu and Cree. The tour will visit Oujé-Bougoumou on September 17.

Inspired by a Cree legend, *Chaakapesh: The Trickster's Quest*, was specially commissioned for the occasion, with music by Matthew Ricketts and words by Tomson Highway. The opera will be sung entirely in Cree, with narration in one of five languages depending on the venue.

The goal of this ambitious tour is to share classical music with all people while promoting cultural exchange through music's transcendent power. During the opera's creation, members of the OSM team joined Highway and Ricketts in artistic residencies in Montreal and the northern village of Ivujivik, organized in collaboration with the Avataq Cultural Institute.

"By reaching north, we are pushing the physical and artistic boundaries of our practice in order to share, exchange and create exceptional works reflecting the diversity of our country, as well as our current reality of living on shared and sometimes disputed territory," said Nagano, the conductor of the OSM since 2006.

The music director has become famous for his boundary-pushing style, including a previous three-stop tour of Nunavik with seven musicians in 2008, performing with narration in Inuktitut and parts for throat singers.

This time Nagano will be accompanied by the full orchestra in "a contemporary tribute to the sounds, people and traditions of our own land." The production was commissioned with funds from the Canada Council's New Chapter initiative.

"By engaging with diverse traditions, we are transforming the expectations of symphony orchestras in the 21st century, while doing our best to address an urgent need for projects of mediation and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations," he added.

Tomson Highway is certainly one of Canada's foremost voices in Indigenous theatre, as well as a celebrated novelist and talented pianist. He wrote the first-ever opera in the Cree language a decade ago, feeling the language's natural melody fit the operatic form beautifully. He has since become an ardent proponent of writing in one's first language.

"Because if anybody in this country is capable of saving those languages from extinction, it's the writers," Highway remarked in 2010, when his successful English plays were relaunched in Cree versions.

His first opera, *Pimooteewin*, was about a trickster's visit to the land of the dead, based on both First Nations myth and a dream experienced while lying beside his dying brother. *Chaakapesh* also uses mythology to tell a story close to his heart. Highway overcame abuse and isolation in residential schools to make the most of available opportunities and is portrayed as defiantly happy in recent interviews.

Chaakapesh, sometimes called "little brother" or similar variations, is a common character in Cree, Innu and other Indigenous legends. He is depicted as a trickster, ignoring his sister's warnings but always overcoming trouble with his immense strength and positive nature. Since the myth cycle usually ends with him residing on the moon, he's often called the Man in the Moon in English.

"[Highway] did his own version of the legend," said singer Florent Vollant, who will narrate the Innu performances of the opera. "This one is very different. In this version, Chaakapesh has the power to make people laugh. White people want to destroy the people of Chaakapesh and he is doing something that will save his people. He wants to teach them how to laugh."

Filmmaker and Nation co-founder Ernest Webb will be narrating the Cree

The tour will visit Oujé-Bougoumou on **September 17.**

It's what you feel as the music hits you in your heart, in your ***spirit and in your soul****. A lot of people will be touched by this*
- Ernest Webb

Group photo provided by the OSM

Photos by Ernie Webb

Chaakapesh represents a meaningful opportunity for **reconciliation and cultural exchange**

performance in Ouje-Bougamou. He was quite familiar with the character because *the Nation* published many of these legends in its early days.

"The way some people look at the legends, a lot of people assume they talk about the past, how things used to be," Webb said. "Then a lot of people look at them as prophecies as well, as what the future could bring. It also addresses a very serious subject – how we were able to survive and keep our spirit alive is being able to laugh through the different challenges we faced as people."

The narrators are tasked with moving the story along so the audience can follow. Since Highway wrote *Chaakapesh* in the Cree dialect of his native northern Manitoba, Webb has been adjusting the text to fit the Cree from back home while retaining the original's meaning and spirit.

"That's who I keep in mind as my primary audience, the people back home," Webb said. "So to be able to take it there is quite special and meaningful for me."

Webb and Vollant attended separate rehearsals to see how the opera would take shape, working with the singers and a pianist while receiving guidance about stage placement, the rhythm of speaking and where to look during performances.

Both narrators seemed excited and a little nervous to be part of such a prestigious production and also curious to witness the reactions of audiences during the northern tour following the world premiere in Montreal.

"It's a new form that we haven't seen before up north," Webb reflected. "People might have this perception that it's only for high society or the elite or something foreign, but music transcends all cultures and people and languages. It's what you feel as the music hits you in your heart, in your spirit and in your soul. A lot of people will be touched by this."

For Vollant, *Chaakapesh* represents a meaningful opportunity for reconciliation and cultural exchange.

"I know that Kent Nagano wants to bring people together through the orchestra," he said. "What is important in this kind of project is to raise awareness of Indigenous culture and the world of myth. And to introduce the symphony orchestra to Indigenous children and Elders – I think a beautiful exchange is going to take place."

Flora Weistchee's beaded artwork is **dedicated to all Indigenous women**

My Grandmother's Garden

by Jamie Pashagumskum
Photos by Tristan Beauregard

"It came to me in a dream in 2015," said recent Facebook phenom Flora Weistchee, artisan and designer of a beading project called My Grandmother's Garden. In her dream Flora was at her kitchen table with a full caribou hide spread out in front of her and her late grandmother, Helen Weistchee, sat across from her.

Her grandmother spoke but Flora couldn't hear what she was saying. Looking down, she noticed three large floral designs in the middle of the hide.

When she woke that morning Flora started drawing the designs she had seen in her dream. These would become the three main flowers and the beginning of her three-year beading project covering a full caribou hide. Flora finished My Grandmother's Garden on August 28.

My Grandmother's Garden is set to be unveiled at the opening ceremony of the new Robin's Nest woman's shelter in Waskaganish on September 18.

During the research stage of her undertaking, Flora looked for a similar project where a full caribou hide was beaded on, but she couldn't find any. Although creating art on caribou hides is an old tradition, Flora said she couldn't find any projects like the one she was planning.

"Out of thousands and thousands of pages all I found were painted caribou hides. I think this is truly a one-of-a-kind process," she said.

"I wanted to take beading to the next level. My family knows me – whenever I try to do something I try to do it to the extreme."

Since starting the project that morning in 2015, Flora has frequently posted her progress on Facebook and has received a lot of attention for it. But the story really started back in 1979.

That year, her father, Sanders Weistchee, a traditional hunter and trapper, got two caribou. At the time he noticed the herds were declining so he made the decision to stop hunting them. He never hunted caribou again.

Flora's mother, Florrie, kept the hides in storage for 36 years until she came across them by accident while going through some containers. Florrie wanted to use it for snowshoe weaving but Flora asked her mother if she could have one of the hides.

"She gave it to me, usually she would say no when I asked her for moose hide. I guess she thought I would waste it," Flora said.

Delighted, Flora brought the hide back to Montreal where she lives with her family and kept it for almost a year. In 2015, she was going to cut it up to make patterns for purses, moccasins and gloves.

One night she was looking at floral patterns online and came across works by Métis artist Christi Belcourt.

"I was fascinated with her artwork," Flora said. "It's almost like beading but painted."

That night her grandmother appeared in her dream. There was a hole in the hide so in her dream Flora asked her grandmother about it.

"I asked her, 'Gookum, what am I going to do with that hole?' She spoke but I couldn't hear her. The only thing I heard was 'ihiipii' – meaning net. So I made a dream catcher."

My Grandmother's Garden features over 50 beaded floral designs including diagrams with almost 100 beaded patterns in total. On average, each pattern took three weeks to complete.

The large central design was the first to go on and the last pattern beaded on was a silver hair braid tied with a purple ribbon encircling the dream catcher.

Each pattern has a story behind it that holds a special meaning. The silver braid represents all the grandmothers in the Cree Nation and across Canada.

"My grandmother used to love getting her hair combed and braided," Flora said. "It's so nicely tied up and it represents that we have to take care of our Elders because they took care of us."

Flora dedicated My Grandmother's Garden to all Indigenous women. Each flower on it is a different shape and size and no two are the same.

"Because all women are different. They're all raised differently and they are all unique in their own way," she explained.

All four elements are represented on Weistchee's work including a turtle in reference to Turtle Island.

"It's kind of like my version of our family creation story."

The three central designs represent her grandmother and her two sisters, Hannah and Minnie MacLeod, who came to Waskaganish from Mistissini as teenagers. The flower in the middle was for her grandmother and the two beside it for the sisters.

"That's where it started, with the three main flowers and it grew," Flora said with a laugh, pun intended.

*Once I finished the last beadwork, **I just looked at it and started crying**. I truly believe this was one of my purposes in life because of the dream I had*

- Artisan and Designer, Flora Weistchee

Flora Weistchee with her artwork

She said some of the patterns, like her grandmother's, are dedicated to specific women such as her mom, Waskaganish Elder Mary Katapatuk, Weistchee's late aunt Minnie Wesley and the late Gertie Murdoch.

A design of a butterfly surrounded by a pink ribbon is dedicated to Flora's friend Sarah, who recently passed away from breast cancer.

"I wanted her story to live on in My Grandmother's Garden," Flora said, adding that she also did it for Sarah's husband and sons.

Flora said she was overcome with emotion upon completing the project. "Once I finished the last beadwork I just sat there for a while. I looked at it and started crying. I truly believe this was one of my purposes in life because of the dream I had."

Flora thinks her grandmother wanted her to do this project to honour her father's decision to stop hunting caribou for the greater good of the herd. She says her grandmother came to her because her father's caribou was killed in 1979, the year of Flora's birth.

Flora said she hopes when women view her piece they will feel inspired to bead, empowered and proud of who they are as strong Indigenous women.

When asked what she will do with her time now, Flora replied with a laugh. "I still have the second hide." She then added that she will be taking time to concentrate on her career and family.

Fur future

Cree Trappers' Association celebrates 40 years of Cree culture

by Felix von Geyer | Photos by Ndiamon

The Cree Trappers' Association (CTA) celebrated its 40th anniversary at its general assembly in Mistissini by honouring past leaders who helped the CTA preserve traditional Cree culture during the past four decades since the signing of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement in 1975.

While the JBNQA signalled a substantial change in Cree life, the CTA is helping Crees maintain traditions, said Allan House, Secretary-Treasurer of the CTA.

The CTA provides income-security programs for trappers while providing "green fur" through the humane harvesting and preservation of fur-bearing animals.

"It is about the human connection to the planet," said Paul Dixon, a tallyman with the CTA who underlined the role of duty in connection to earth. "There is no word for 'rights' in the Cree language but it is only the Aboriginals who believe that man belongs to the earth. The White Man says the earth belongs to him."

Among the highlights of the General Assembly was a Chisasibi resolution on waterfowl habitats. It gave a mandate to the CTA executive committee to participate in a scientific third-party investigation of negative impacts affecting eelgrass beds. Similarly, the CTA will monitor disease among fur-bearing animals.

These diseases are bringing health risks to trappers, including zoonosis, contracted from moose. A zoonosis, as defined by the World Health Organization, is any disease transmitted by vertebrate animals to humans, whether parasitic, bacterial, viral or through "unconventional agents". Heightened mercury levels in fish and

"It is only the Aboriginals who believe that man belongs to the earth. The White Man says ***the earth belongs to him"***

- CTA Tallyman, Paul Dixon

waterways are contaminating meat, House explained, while poor drinking water quality remained an outstanding issue.

Dixon again referred to the perception of man's identity with the land. "When Columbus turned up 500 years ago, he didn't bring a piece of land with him. But he did bring a shovel. You have to be careful what you do with that shovel," he said.

The CTA general assembly also addressed issues of air quality, notably carbon monoxide and mould in cabins.

However, the lasting highlight of the general assembly was the applause given to President Fred Tomatuk's plan to roll out a one-year trapping course.

Eeyou Eenou Ituun, delivered in Cree, will be accredited by Cégep de Saint-Felicien. "The assembly adopted the resolution. The Cree Nation Government had a delegation there including Grand Chief Abel Bosum and we were all applauding the initiative," concluded House.

Hanging moose and trout to smoke

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Justice and Correctional Services
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Back to the roots

Waswanipi hosts the Nishiiyuu Council of Elders cultural gathering

by Joshua Grant | Photos by Irene Otter

Waswanipi hosts the Nishiiyuu Council of Elders annual cultural gathering

As part of its ongoing mission to preserve Cree culture and traditional practices, the Nishiiyuu Council of Elders held its eighth annual cultural celebration August 20-23 in Waswanipi.

This year's gathering was a collaboration between the Nishiiyuu Council, the Cree Nation Youth Council, the Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association (CWEIA) and the Anishchaaukamikw Cultural Institute, with each organization hosting workshops and activities on separate days.

"Many studies have found that suicide rates are higher in Native communities where residents don't know anything about their past," said Janie Pachano, treasurer and one of the Nishiiyuu council's three founding members.

"In communities where there's a strong connection between Elders and the youth, even though they might not live like they used to, they still carry the values and speak their language. It's very important to continue transferring our knowledge about our culture, about our history."

Irene Otter, a member of the Waswanipi Elders' Council, emphasized the importance of practicing, teaching and sharing the stream of knowledge that has flowed through countless generations in Eeyou Istchee.

"A lot of people say we're losing our culture, that the youth aren't participating," said Otter. "But then you see parents bringing their daughters and their sons, and Elders sharing their knowledge with the youth. It's totally awesome."

Pachano and Otter described the different programs and activities held at the Waswanipi sports complex, with some workshops in the cultural village.

"There was sewing, storytelling, we talked about snowshoe ceremonies, walking out ceremonies, there was a waspisuuan workshop – making wraps for babies. We even had one guy sign up for that," Otter laughed.

"There were several workshops going on, there was a sabtuan, people were sewing, making baby bonnets, moss bags for babies, another workshop on beading," noted Pachano. "People got to see the process of cleaning and smoking moose hide, all the way through, starting from a hide that still had hair on it."

The activities were relaxing, she added. "You just went from one workshop to another and it was a very natural setting."

Of course, it wouldn't be a Cree gathering without a ton of Cree food.

"We served mostly traditional food, that's what the Elders love to eat," said Otter. "We had traditional tea: cedar and Labrador, and of course the Elders all asked for chinookoojam, 'You better make sure you make it!' they said.

"A long time ago, people didn't have a lot of butter or jam so they would just mix it all up together at weddings and other events, and that's how people in Waswanipi started making chinookoojam," she explained.

"Our feast was really big," Otter continued. "One day it was a feast with all the different kinds of traditional meat, and the last day it was a fish feast, with sturgeon, trout and walleye."

> *Even during the workshops while people were sewing, they were telling stories and sharing things.* ***It was really enjoyable***
> *- Treasurer and Council of Elders founding member, Janie Pachano,*

Otter said that Eeyouch from all across the James Bay came to participate in the activities, including Grand Chief Abel Bosum and his family, Deputy Grand Chief Mandy Gull and several chiefs from other communities.

Otter highlighted how an 11-year-old girl used the event as an opportunity to fundraise for her young friend Phoenix, who is in the hospital battling cancer.

"We opened the door for people who want to fundraise for special occasions and she called and asked if she could come," said Otter. "The Elders all donated money towards her cause and she was thrilled. She sold all the desserts she brought to sell! I thought it was cute."

For Pachano's part, the highlight of the gathering was a presentation by Charlie Bosum, the Nishiiyuu Council's board member from Ouje-Bougoumou.

"He spoke about his past and his childhood, and he came in with all kinds of different things," said Pachano. "Different types of snowshoes, sleds, toboggans. He brought his first pair of snowshoes from when he was a child and then he showed us his second pair and then the first pair he made when he was an adult. It was very interesting, usually people don't have all of the materials to show exactly what they're talking about."

Pachano credited Stella Masty Bearskin for bringing together the entities responsible for programming and for coordinating the various presentations and workshops. She also praised the community of Waswanipi for their efforts behind the scenes and for opening their homes to visitors.

"The people in Waswanipi who were involved were constantly working," she said. "Even if they were delegates they would jump in, keep everyone organized, keep the meetings moving smoothly. I have to thank those who opened their homes, it wasn't just the Elders – there were many youth in attendance as well. People were very generous."

Pachano said the weekend brought back memories of a time when people would visit in the afternoon. "Even during the workshops while people were sewing, they were telling stories and sharing things. It was really enjoyable."

Otter was grateful for the widespread support from many Cree organizations. "We want to thank them for giving us the chance to host. We're trying to continue the transfer of knowledge: language, culture, ceremonies. That's what is important to the Nishiisyuu Council of Elders and that's what they want us to showcase at each gathering we have."

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Greening Mistissini

Cree community develops state-of-the-art waste management system

by Amy German

As stewards of the land, the Cree Nation of Mistissini is walking the talk when it comes to recycling and waste management.

According to Mistissini Public Services Manager Jonathan MacLeod, the idea for the community's Eco-centre was put into place under the premise of best practices for the protection of the land and environment.

Initially, a pilot project raised awareness among community residents about recycling and household waste. The first year of the recycling program involved only 50 homes. The following year they bumped it up to 100, and eventually the project outgrew the environment administrator. At that point the project was handed over to public works to take on the responsibility of collection and proper disposal or reuse of recyclables.

"Recycling in the community has been practiced for a number of years now," said MacLeod. "We have expanded operations from baling cardboard and paper to baling plastic. We produce five cardboard/paper bales per week and three plastic bales."

This reduced the number of trips to Chibougamau, where his department delivers recyclable waste for transport to a recycling plant. Mistissini doesn't produce enough material to transport to a plant directly, though McLeod says they are planning to make arrangements to work directly with a recycling plant such as Cascade for cardboard and paper bales.

The band now has two full-time employees for collection from residences, businesses and institutions. Another employee handles sorting and baling with occasional help from someone from a work-experience program.

"We also have a full-time person at the Eco-centre, where we sort and store bulky waste, like tires, metal, solvents, reusable appliances and electronics," noted McLeod. "We store the bulky waste there until we have the volume to call a recycling company, which will properly dispose of the solvents or electronics. The tires and metals are also picked up and transported to a recycling facility. The cost of recycling is expensive, but necessary to maintain a clean a safer environment."

The band council budgets $15,000 to transport materials with an additional $130,000 for wage costs.

Down the road, MacLeod said the community could really use a composting facility for recycling wood from the construction in the community. Usually construction waste will go to the landfill. Composting will be more of an "end phase" activity, explained McLeod.

"The Cree Nation Government did fund the development of the Eco-centre and also the operation and maintenance of the facility. The Cree Nation Government has been supportive of our recycling program. Hopefully this will continue for generations to come. I am sure the recycling will only improve in the future as we become better informed and better educated. Cree people have always considered the land sacred. We have always believed the land will provide for our needs and therefore protecting it comes naturally to us. If we take care of the land, it will take care of us," MacLeod concluded.

The Band now has **two full time employees** for collection from residences, businesses, and institutions

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Back to the books

by Sonny Orr

Rez Notes

My daughter rushes around to get ready for her second year of college. Getting around the campus and planning to buy furniture is also on the schedule for the day. I point out that she didn't bring her books with her to class and she shrugs, showing me her USB memory stick.

"That's all?" I ask. A quick nod and I turn my attention back to the GPS that guides me to the wrong address. For some reason it points me to the nearby hospital instead of the college and I grunt out my displeasure. Back in the day, I just had to run across the street to get to class, but today it's a complicated affair. My daughter laughs at my old-fashioned ways and saves me with her cellphone, which tells me where I need to go. Geez, even my new GPS is already outdated.

When I went to school in the south, packsacks hadn't been invented. We had to carry stacks of books everywhere and our arms looked as if professional wrestlers had trained us for years. Yes, paper was a cheap commodity back then and no one worried about our forests. In fact, recycling was actually not even a word back then. The computer I trained on was the size of a poutine snackstand and would take days to carry out our computations. I thought my brain was faster than that and I stuck to the slide rule and abacus. The personal calculator was not around for anyone's use except for NASA, who often had to correct the metal machines' output with ordinary human brain matter.

Today's academic brainiacs have just about everything at their fingertips. The learning process is quicker and easier, but does the smartphone have what it takes to replace the human mind? Is the laptop an endangered species already? Are we now smarter than the teachers of old? Can the level of education get so high that we will need to test our own technical prowess instead of our brains?

Like, hey, does your phone have the latest processor and can it ace the last exam in under five minutes or is it electronically stunted and can only finish the exam in five-and-a-half minutes? Can it make money for you online in between classes, enough to pay for your lunch? Can it interpret your slang fast enough to respond to your vocal desires? Or can it scan your eyes and determine whether or not the online food order is good enough for your taste buds?

Only time will tell. Time, by the way, is now measured in nanoseconds, making the thousandth of a microsecond the standard measurement in smartness. That means that if it takes more than a day to figure something out, then it must be impossible to determine whether the truth is out there.

The future does look bright for those who want to keep up with the rest of the technological world, but for old-school guys like me, time has no meaning. Therefore, we are free from the bonds of timely commitments, deadlines and schedules.

The right answers are not as important as the right choices. The wrong answers are still possible and mistakes are still made through old-fashioned trial and error. Today, my packsack holds my trusty laptop and the endless spaghetti mess of charging and connection cords. Small paper notes with passwords clutter the tiny pockets on the sides. A heavy thermos is still standard issue and the day still has 24 hours, making the week feel like a few days instead of a trillion milliseconds.

Yes, life may drag on, but who is in a rush for life to go by quickly? Not me.

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UTNS

Under the Northern Sky

Singing and drumming **hope**

by Xavier Kataquapit

I feel a greater sense of hope and optimism these days for the future when I talk to many of our young First Nation people. There are still many hurdles and difficulties they have to overcome, but in many ways, they are becoming stronger, smarter and more confident. I've witnessed those changes through the annual Wabun Youth Gathering, which I have been fortunate enough to attend regularly over the past decade.

This annual event is hosted by Wabun Health Services, a branch of the Wabun Tribal Council based in Timmins. The youth gathering was born out of a wish by one of its community Elders, the late Thomas Saunders, of Brunswick House, who had a vision to see Wabun youth come together to learn about their culture, language and heritage. Wabun Health Director Jean Lemieux took Saunders' dream of a youth gathering to heart and developed the youth gathering with the support of the Wabun Chiefs and management.

I've watched it grow from a small gathering to a major event that provides young people with access to workshop facilitators who teach them about drumming, singing, traditional crafts and Indigenous games. The gathering is not just fun and games. It brings youth and professionals together to discuss addictions, social issues, dealing with trauma, healing and bullying.

Every year, one or more Elders attend the event as a way to link the youth to their past through teachings and care from these grandmothers.

The youth can count on adults taking the time to care for them in a wilderness setting surrounded by friends. I did not have these types of gatherings to turn to when I was a boy in Attawapiskat. We had an event called Indian Days but it was a far cry from today's healing and educational gatherings.

While attending the Mattagami First Nation Annual Pow Wow recently I realized how lucky the new generation is with traditional events being brought back to First Nations. The Mattagami gathering brings together drummers, singers and performers from the Ojibway, Oji-Cree, Cree and Algonquin communities.

The most important idea behind every Indigenous youth gathering, pow-wow or cultural event is the fact that it celebrates Indigenous culture and heritage. It helps foster a sense of pride and hope for young people to feel confident in where they come from and who they are.

Over the years I have witnessed young men like Nathan Naveau and Mark Carpenter become accomplished drummers, singers and performers who have become well known on the pow wow trail. I've watched boys become men as singers and drummers in groups like the Northern Spirit Singers of Brunswick House First Nation.

Belonging to these groups demands adhering to rules and sober lifestyles so the commitment these drummers and singers make is felt in their own community and beyond. It makes me so proud to see young girls and women from the Wabun communities form their own hand drumming and singing groups. In many cases they make their own regalia, construct their drums and learn traditional songs from the Elders.

We have come a long way but there is still much to be done to help our people. However, with every song, every dance and every beat of the heart of the drum, future generations find hope and strength.

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